

How to help your Allergies and Asthma



What is an allergen?

Allergens are common, usually harmless things such as pollen, mold spores, animal dander (dead skin flakes and saliva), dust, foods, insect sting poison, and drugs. Allergens cause people who have allergies to sneeze, wheeze, cough or have other symptoms.

What causes allergies?

People with allergies are born that way, the same way some people are born with brown hair or blue eyes. However, when you are near these allergens, your body can overreact in a number of ways. The pollen, dust or other allergen can make you cough, sneeze or even have trouble breathing.

How can I control my allergies?

Controlling allergies means three things:

- 1) Knowing what you are allergic to. Your allergist/immunologist can help you figure out what these things are.
- 2) Getting medicine, if you need it. Your doctor will work with you to decide which, if any, medicine you need.
- 3) Limiting the amount of allergens you are around. Simple things, like dusting and vacuuming, and keeping your kitchen clean, will help get rid of allergens.

Where should I start?

Start in the bedrooms. This is where you and your children spend most of your time. Then work on the kitchen. Then move to the living room and other areas of your home where you spend a lot of time.

Although it can seem overwhelming, you can work on reducing allergens each week to improve your symptoms. The whole family should help, especially if your children have allergies. Explain how cleaning and getting rid of allergens will help them feel better.

What can I change inside my house?

Dust mites

Dust mites are tiny bugs that live in almost every home. They are so small people cannot see them. Dust mites are a common cause of allergies. To reduce mites in your home:

- Get rid of extra stuff in all rooms. Clutter is anything that will collect dust, like piles of stuffed animals, stacks of books, knick-knacks and collectibles. Allow your children to keep a few items in their bedrooms, but pack the rest in a hall closet so they aren't collecting dust.
- Put mattresses, box springs and pillows in special plastic cases that are allergy-proof or "non-allergenic." Your doctor or nurse can tell you where to buy these things.



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- Wash blankets, sheets and pillowcases in 130 degree water every week. Make sure your hot water heater is set at this temperature, but be careful – this is very hot water and could burn a baby or small child in the bath tub or at the faucet. Make sure to mix hot and cold water when washing hands or bathing.
- Use a dehumidifier to keep your house dry.
- Dust also settles on carpeting. If possible, remove carpeting and replace it with washable throw rugs.

Mold

Molds blow around in the air and cause allergic reactions. They like wet surfaces and tend to turn up in places like bathrooms and below sinks. To reduce molds in the home:

- Fix leaks that may leave surfaces wet and allow mold to grow.
- Clean moldy surfaces, such as the corners of showers or under the sink.
- Use a dehumidifier to keep your house dry.
- Avoid having carpeting in bathrooms or basements and remove any moldy carpeting.

Pets

Cats, dogs, other furry pets and birds can cause allergy symptoms. If allergy testing shows someone in your house has an allergy to an animal, think seriously about giving away the pet. If that is not possible:

- Keep pets out of the bedroom, and keep bedroom doors closed.
- Put mattresses, box springs and pillows in allergy-proof plastic cases.
- Make sure pets stay in one area of the house.
- Wash your hands after touching pets.

Cockroaches

Cockroach droppings are a major asthma trigger, especially in humid, moist areas and inner cities. To control cockroaches:

- Vacuum or sweep the floor after meals, and take the garbage out frequently.
- Keep food in containers with tight lids.
- Wash dishes right after using them, and wipe off countertops and the stove after meals.
- Use plywood or other building materials to block areas where roaches could enter the home, especially small spaces, like wall cracks, window or floor cracks, cellar doors and outside drains.
- Cockroaches like wet, humid areas. Fix and seal leaky faucets and pipes.

In addition to allergens, there are things called *irritants*. People aren't allergic to irritants, but they can make allergy symptoms worse. These are things like fumes and strong smells. Tobacco smoke is a particularly bad irritant. It can really be trouble for people who have allergies and asthma.

- If you or your child have allergies or asthma, do not allow smoking in your house.
- Avoid tobacco smoke in public, and don't let people smoke in your car.

Allergies and asthma are serious conditions. By working with your doctor to develop a plan to avoid allergens and irritants, you are helping you and your family to be healthier.

Your doctor can answer any other questions you have about decreasing allergic reactions. For more information on allergies and asthma, visit www.aaaai.org.



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